

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

DEMOCRATS PLAN FOR A WAY FORWARD IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF) is recognized for half the time until midnight as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, there have been too many dark days in Iraq of late, but today is not one of them. The removal of Abu Musab al Zarqawi is a welcome event.

Zarqawi was a blood thirsty thug and an indiscriminate killer of innocent men, women and children. All Americans join in congratulating the American military and the Iraqi people for their success in tracking, finding and eliminating the most vicious terrorist in Iraq.

It is too early to predict what the effect of the elimination of Zarqawi will have on the counterinsurgency effort that the Iraqi and coalition forces are engaged in.

On the one hand there is ample historical evidence that eliminating terrorist and insurgent leaders does not necessarily cripple their movements. New leaders rise up to take their places. In the Iraqi case, however, Zarqawi's form of jihad, which has resulted in the slaughter of so many innocent civilians has alienated most Iraqis and helped to foster reported back-channel negotiations between the U.S., the Iraqi Government and some of the insurgent groups over the past few months.

Whether the confluence of Zarqawi's death and the completion of the new Iraqi cabinet can accelerate the prospects for some kind of more open negotiations remains to be seen. Especially as the sectarian violence that Zarqawi sought has continued to grow in recent months.

Even as we celebrate Zarqawi's death and recall the horrors he perpetrated, the videotaped beheadings of helpless hostages, the mass casualty suicide bombings of Shiite mosques, and the horrific destruction of the UN headquarters, we cannot turn away from the grim reality, that the war the President declared over in the spring of 2003 has been bloodier, costlier, longer and more difficult than the administration anticipated or planned for.

We need a new way forward in Iraq, and that is what we would like to talk about tonight. The Democratic ideas for a new way forward in Iraq are part of an overall effort to reconfigure America's security for the 21st Century, a plan we call Real Security.

Earlier this spring, Members of our party from both the House and the

Senate unveiled a comprehensive blueprint to better protect America and restore our Nation's position of international leadership.

Our plan, Real Security, was devised with the assistance of a broad range of experts, former military officers, retired diplomats, law enforcement personnel, homeland security experts and others, who helped identify key areas where current policies have failed and where new ones were needed.

In a series of six special orders, my colleagues and I have been sharing with the American people our vision for a more secure America. The plan has five pillars, and each of our special order hours have been addressing them in turn: Building a 21st Century Military, Winning the War on Terror, Providing for Our Homeland Security, A Way Forward in Iraq, and the Achievement of Energy Independence.

Tonight we address a New Course in Iraq, to make 2006 a year of significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty, with the Iraqis assuming primary responsibility for securing and governing their country with a responsible redeployment of U.S. forces.

Democrats will insist that Iraqis make the political compromises necessary to unite the country and defeat the insurgency, promote regional diplomacy and strongly encourage our allies and other nations to play a constructive role.

I have been to Iraq three times to visit our troops there, and I have spent time with our wounded here and in Germany. They have done everything we have asked of them, and they have done it magnificently. Whatever success we have had in Iraq, every village that was secured, every public works project that was completed, every school that was reopened, is due to the efforts of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines.

But, Mr. Speaker, these heroes are still being killed and wounded daily. Over 2,450 American troops have been killed and thousands more have been injured. American taxpayers are paying approximately \$194 million a day for the war, according to the CBO. That is more than \$1 billion a week.

A recent Congressional Research Service report puts the current cost of continued operations in Iraq and Afghanistan at close to \$10 billion a month, with most of that money going to Iraq.

This is a conflict that has come to grief in so many ways. In the fall of 2002, Congress voted to authorize the use of force against Iraq because of the threat that Saddam Hussein had stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, and because we were told he had an active nuclear weapons program.

If you go back and look at the debate in the House and Senate, this was a decision taken by the Congress to prevent Iraq from acquiring and using or transferring nuclear weapons.

Months later as American forces pushed across the Kuwaiti frontier and

into Iraq, we were told by the President that our troops were on a hunt for weapons of mass destruction. Delivering the Iraqi people from the brutality of Saddam Hussein was a noble act, but the promotion of democracy in Iraq was not our primary reason for going to war.

Similarly, we knew that the Shiite majority had suffered terribly under the Ba'athist regime, and freeing them from the oppression of the Sunni minority was an added benefit of the invasion. But reordering the ethnic balance of political power in Iraq was not our primary purpose for going to war.

Soon after the fall of Baghdad, it became clear that many of the prewar assumptions that had guided the President and his advisors were wrong. There were no chemical or biological weapons. There was no nuclear program. And while many Iraqis celebrated the ouster of Saddam Hussein, they did not line the streets of Baghdad to greet our troops with flowers. In fact, within days, there emerged the beginnings of what would be an organized, deadly insurgency that would quickly put an end to General Tommy Frank's plan to pare down the 140,000 troops in Iraq in April of 2003 to 30,000 by September of 2003.

In recent months, the nature of the struggle in Iraq has changed yet again. Long-simmering ethnic tensions which had been suppressed under Saddam's totalitarian regime have threatened to tear the country apart.

While the full-scale civil war that many feared in the wake of the bombing of Askariya mosque in Samarra has not come to pass, not yet, most observers believe the country is currently in the grip of a low-level civil war that could erupt into full-scale conflict at any time.

As first, much of the sectarian violence was perpetrated by Sunni insurgents who saw continuing violence and instability in Iraq as their best hope to gain power in a country dominated by Shia Muslims.

Shiite political factions have responded by creating militias, and these have become more active in targeting Sunnis over the past few months. In recent weeks I have been concerned by media reports that Shiite militias have been deploying to Kirkuk, Iraq's third largest city, in a bid to forestall any attempt by Kurds to assert control over this major center of Iraq's oil-rich north.

In Baghdad, Shiite units, some of them nominally under the control of the Ministry of Interior, have acted as death squads, and the streets of the capital have become a dumping ground for bodies.

We have a moral obligation to do what we can to avoid having Iraq spiral into all-out civil war. But now is the time for Iraqis themselves to decide whether they wish to be one country. That is the decision we cannot make for them.

Accordingly, the first element of the Real Security Plan for Iraq calls for